

SARASWATI'S CHANGING SOUND:

*An Anthropological Look at the Socio-Psychological Dynamics of Hindustani Music**

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I am going to consider a number of ways of examining Hindustani musical culture which I think will be of value in coming to a better understanding of musical change. I should say at the outset that I spent two-and-a-half years in India — mainly in Delhi — doing research on classical musicians. My major interests have been the attitudes of musicians about themselves and their profession, and also their internal social organization. Particularly as a result of this latter interest in social organization, most of my research was concentrated among hereditary families of musicians, and a large part of this aspect concerned hereditary musicians who specialized as accompanists, that is *sarangi* and *tabla* players. This then is a summary of my own ethnomusicological experiences and, if you like, biases.

Except for a few biographies, a well-known autobiography and a few other articles, there is little in the way of studies about musicians. Yet it is these musicians who have been responsible for carrying on that great tradition of India, her classical music. It is undoubtedly for this reason that Professor Milton Singer has suggested as a general goal, the desirability of studying the cultural specialist as a means for coming to a better understanding of Indian Civilization.¹

Who are these cultural specialists of the musical world? I would like to suggest that there are two major types, and that a study and comparison of

*First read as a paper at the Conference on Psychology and Music, Poona, 1974.

1. One wants to know more about the cultural specialist than can be learned from watching him perform: his recruitment, training, remuneration, motivation, attitude towards his career, his relation to his audience, patron, other performers and his community — all matters that can best be discovered by interviewing the specialist himself.

Singer, Milton, 1972, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes*. New York: Praeger Publishers.

these two types may give us some clue about the direction of Indian classical music in the future. These two types are, broadly speaking, musicians who come from hereditary families of musicians, and musicians who do not come from such families. From my own research it seems clear that an important shift in the musical world of India within the last half century or so, is the increased proportion of musicians coming from families not traditionally specializing in music as a profession. What are the implications and ramifications of this phenomenon for the culture of Hindustani music? These seem to operate at a number of levels.

Biological Level

One level is the biological. It is often said, by both musicians and connoisseurs, that music is "in the blood" of hereditary musicians. Whether this is actually the case is impossible to tell at this point, but it does suggest that we consider the possibilities in terms of talent. For example, among Muslim families of musicians, there is a rather high proportion of cousin marriage, and if there are aspects of musical talent which are heritable, one might discover a higher proportion of "talented" individuals within this population, than one would find with other populations. In addition to this is the fact that Muslims are allowed more than one wife. If, as seems to be the case, the more economically self-sufficient individuals tend to have more wives, and if there is a significant correlation between economic success and musical success (these "ifs" are of course open to much debate) then it might be the case that the more talented musicians have more wives and therefore more opportunities for fathering talented offspring. One way to go about testing these propositions is to make a genealogical study of musician families and see if this is in fact the case.

There are certain other implications to this kind of study as well. One might inquire for example if there is a correlation between the choice of wife (or wives) and musical talent. For example, do the daughters of "successful" musicians tend to marry the sons of successful musicians? Or put a somewhat different way, are there a higher proportion of cousin marriages from among the offspring of "successful" musicians than non-successful musicians? There are of course many methodological problems involved in a study such as this one, not the least of which is coming to a definition of successful. But since All India Radio is able to grade musicians according to the recommendations of a selection board, perhaps a similar appraisal could be attempted for musicians of the past.

We have so far considered only the heritability aspects of musical creativity; there is of course the very important fact of the environment. It would certainly seem to be the case that the musical environment in the families of hereditary musicians is relatively rich, and that in such an environment there would be a high premium on discovering and nurturing talented individuals.

One would expect therefore a higher probability that a talented individual born in a musician family will be discovered, compared to the more accidental discovery of talented individuals born in a non-musical environment. But a musical environment is probably significant not only for discovering and nurturing talented individuals, it has other functions as well.

These functions might be grouped together under the category of enculturation. Enculturation means simply the process of learning one's culture. A child raised in India, born to Indian parents, becomes enculturated to the Indian way of life. More specifically, I would like to suggest that a child born into a family of musicians becomes enculturated to a musical way of life. Such a child does not only learn to perform a given system of music, he also learns all the other aspects of a musical culture which makes a music such as Indian classical music so rich and varied. He learns for example, the folklore of his community. The stories of great musicians of the past, their devotion to *riaz*, the magic performed by their music and so forth. The child learns the values of his musical community as well. That *izzat* must be given to his teacher, so that when mentioning the name of his *guru*, or when taking up the instrument to practice, he automatically touches his ears with his hand. He learns also the more mundane aspects of the profession when while sitting on the stage with his *ustad*, he learns how an artist handles himself on the stage and presumably how an artist handles the audience as well. One could go on and on, but these aspects must all be well known to you and their significance therefore appreciated. One can learn all these things later on as well, but as with learning another language as an adult, the accent perhaps rarely becomes perfect. One should add as a last point here, that in a musical community, one learns not only from the father but the mother as well. How many stories have we all heard about a mother guiding her son through his musical education in the absence of another male relative.

Non-hereditary Musicians

If we now turn and consider individuals who have become musicians but were not born into a musician's family what can we expect to find? From a biological point of view, one again is largely limited to asking questions about the ramifications of a different kind of social organization from which musicians are recruited. In the widest sense we are dealing with a much larger gene pool and along with this a greater genetic diversity. In practice of course there are certain limiting factors of a sociological nature. Most non-hereditary musicians are recruited from the upper castes and because of the economic exigencies involved in a musical education (outside the musician-family system of course) they are also recruited from the middle and upper class. Because of this, such musicians tend to have a wider educational background and perhaps a wider variety of experiences as well. Thus we find a more complex pattern of genetic and environmental diversity which may have certain selective advantages in an increasingly complex social environment.

This complex social environment is of course contemporary Indian society. Without tediously retracing steps one need only say that with new sources of patronage, new media for music performance and an expanded system of musical education, Hindustani musical culture is undergoing what appear to be fundamental changes. Teaching in educational institutions is becoming a primary means of support for many musicians, and younger musicians are finding it necessary to have diplomas in order to successfully compete for these positions, even if they have had a very thorough musical training with a *guru* or an *ustad*. Musicians are also finding it politic to be able to communicate verbally with individuals from all walks of life since important contacts are a way of becoming known, being invited to conferences, getting upgraded at A.I.R. and going abroad on overseas tours.

What all this seems to indicate is that for a musician to succeed in earning a living as a musician, he (or she) must be highly adaptable to new and changing conditions, and most significantly, must spend a great deal of time in non-musical activities in order to make it as a musician. The time that is taken up for these activities is not merely the physical time which is used up, but the mental time taken for thinking about what sorts of strategies to adopt in order to build a career as a musician.

Changing Conditions

How then does all this affect the personality of the musician and through this, his music? Seen from the perspective of the society as a whole, it would seem that musicians coming from the concentrated and highly specialized traditions of hereditary musical families, are less able to adapt to the demands of changing socio-cultural conditions. After all, the social organization of traditional musicians apparently evolved in response to the needs of the royal courts of medieval India, and this kind of social organization was highly adapted to that kind of societal niche. The niche has changed dramatically at an accelerated pitch, and one suspects that the kind of training, the exclusive pre-occupation with music to the exclusion of other kinds of education, and the highly specialized and esoteric music addressed to an audience with a highly refined musical sensibility is not adequate (unhappy as that might be) to today's musical demands. If this is true, then what we are witnessing today is a generation of younger musicians who have been only partially enculturated, imbibing the sayings as it were without the feelings of the older musical tradition, and being reduced to giving lip service to values which they can no longer afford to live by. Much of the negativism one hears about today's music in comparison with the music of the past may merely be a reflection of the high premium that Indian Civilization puts on its own past, but I think the distaste which many have with today's musicians stems from the breakdown of the traditional social organization which was so elegantly prepared to produce great musicians.

In a more direct sense, the affect of the social environment on contemporary musicians seems to be one of continuous debilitation. The necessity of moving to the metropolitan centers in order to gain a living, the urbanization of musical culture one might call it, is probably not a new phenomenon, since musicians have always found it expedient to migrate to where cultural performances would be concentrated. Yet whereas musicians in the past moved largely to medium sized towns or smaller cities where the princely courts were located (and where many of their ancestral homes are still located, the names of *gharanas* will tell you where) they are today concentrated in the great cities of India where the pace of social and cultural change is not only initiated but magnified. It is crowded in Old Delhi, in a way that it never was in Rampur, and it is difficult to find a place to do one's *ricz*.

It is ironic that as music has become a respectable profession, recruiting increasingly from respectable families, traditional musicians, many of whom do not come from "respectable" social backgrounds, view a successful musical career as a means of social mobility *out* of the profession for their sons. Sons are being educated in school and encouraged to (in many instances) adopt other professions. This indicates not only what we can expect from the future, but gives an idea of the attitude of today's musicians about their work. I think in many cases there is a great deal of disillusionment and sometimes outright cynicism about being a musician. This is by no means universally true, but to many musicians, their music is only a small portion of what is required to make a career. The importance of touring abroad and being foreign returned" in the process of building a career, makes little musical sense (why should foreign audiences define quality in Indian musicians) but still it is there. The danger of foreign tours is not what influence that experience might have directly on an artist's music, but the attack it makes on his cultural integrity and traditional sensibilities. This I think is not true of the older, more mature artist, who is not so readily deceived by the other world, but to younger artists — and a surprising number have been abroad — this may be a grave danger.

Conclusion

In summary then, when we consider the socio-psychological dynamics of a musical system we have to examine two basic problems. The first is what is the relationship between changes in the social organization of musicians and the resultant change in the *distribution* of personality traits. If in the past 80% of all musicians were recruited from a very homogeneous group, socially, culturally and psychologically, and now-a-days only 50% are, what influence does the other 50%, recruited from a variety of diverse groups, have on the music system as a whole?

The second problem is the more direct relationship between the socio-cultural environment and its influence on the psychology of the individual musician and through this on his music.

The preceding has necessarily only touched the surface of what is inevitably a very important set of problems. Having given however a rather pessimistic view about the future of Indian music, I would like to balance this with an optimistic perspective which I hold as well.

Contrary to the impression some have, India, especially North India, has been the stage for many cultural changes from pre-historic times on. At the same time, if one reads older works in which the then contemporary music is compared with *its* past music, the past always seems more authentic, more true than the present. A good example of this can be found in Imam's middle nineteenth century *Maudanul Musiqui* (Sangeet Natak Akademi Bulletins 1959, Nos. 11-14). Yet the strength of India's civilization seems to lie, as Singer has suggested, in its great adaptability to changing conditions, and this is true I think especially as regards her music. Perhaps just such a pessimistic outlook expressed in the present, as part of India's cultural heritage, is what is required to keep a great tradition on the true path.

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